WHERE ARE WE DRIFTING?

By BRO. R. J. MEEKREN

Statistics Show Some Interesting Trends in Modern Masonry. They Are Graphically Presented in the Article Which Follows. The Light Thrown on Our Present System of Admissions Is an Important Contribution to the Craft.

WHAT is the actual condition of the Masonic Fraternity in America today? We know that it has well over three million members, and there is undoubtedly a certain prestige given by such huge numbers. But in itself this does not tell us much of real value. Those who have read, even occasionally, the Reports of our Grand Lodges during the past ten years know that there has been a great expansion since the War. They will also be aware that there has been considerable, though vague, uneasiness in regard to the increasing losses due to members dropping out of the organization. Some Grand Lodges have been so impressed by these fears that they have introduced regulations restricting the freedom of the individual Mason by denying him the right to dimission from his lodge, permitting him only to transfer his membership. Whether justified or not, this is undoubtedly an innovation in the "body of Freemasonry," although those who advocate it do not seem to realize the fact. But though such drastic attempts to stop the leaks are being made or advocated, no one seems to have any very clear comprehension of the amount of these losses and their relation to the total membership.

It is a very curious thing that this lack of definite knowledge should exist, and all the more curious in view of the fact that American Grand Lodges as a anywhere available in the Masonic world. Whenever dual or plural membership is suggested it almost always happens that the first objection advanced against it is the alleged difficulty it would cause in keeping accurate membership rolls. But such records are hardly worth while for their own sake and as an end in themselves.

As a preliminary essay in what is almost a virgin field of investigation I have prepared the accompanying charts to show certain relationships between the gains and losses in membership over a period of fifteen years. The basic figures used for this purpose have been taken from the tables that have been compiled annually since 1913 by Bro. George A. Kies, Grand Secretary of Connecticut, and published annually in the Proceedings of that Grand Lodge. Without this foundation to build upon it is doubtful whether I should ever have had the courage to undertake this task, even had time been available. Bro. Kies, therefore, should have at least half of whatever credit may be due.

As has already been mentioned, the official rulers and leaders of the Craft have very Frequently expressed grave fears in regard to losses from various causes, especially those by suspension for non-payment of dues. Rather less frequently, doubts have been voiced as to whether the growth in the last decade has not been altogether too rapid.

There are four avenues of loss, one of which is inevitable, that is death. The other three are dimission, suspension and expulsion. The first chart shows the relationship between these last. The graphic method of showing the relationship of varying figures is now so frequently used that most people are more or less familiar with it. The curves A and B show respectively the dimissions and affiliations for each year, according to the scale of numbers on the perpendicular axis. It must be borne in mind that on

such a scale only round figures can be used. But this does not affect the general accuracy of the result so far as showing the relationship between them is concerned.

One thing is apparent immediately upon inspection of these two curves, A and B. that they very closely parallel each other over the whole period. It will be noted that in 1916, and again in 1923, the distance between them increases. This distance represents in each year the difference between the number of Masons dimitted and those affiliated. It is quite possible that economic and other external causes would account for this divergence of the curves at these two periods. The normal reason for dimission is change of residence. Whenever conditions lead to a general movement of population, such divergence is naturally to be expected. Whether the later divergence that appears in 1927 can be wholly accounted for in this way is not clear. For that we must wait and see. But on the whole we may conclude that the relationship between dimission and affiliation appears to be quite normal, and the difference no greater than should be naturally expected.

The curve E shows the expulsions. While 674, the total for 1927, is altogether too many - it means that in over 600 lodges there has been careless investigation, or too little courage in denying admission to unfit applicants, yet relatively the figures are so small as to have little significance in a broad survey. And while the number has nearly doubled in the fifteen years, the rate of increase has been much less in proportion than the rate of growth. This is certainly not a discouraging feature.

The curves C and D show the relationship between suspensions and reinstatements. As in the case of A and B. the distance between these two curves shows the balance of the number of Masons suspended over those reinstated in any given year. We see there was an increase in these from 1913 to 1915, and then, after some fluctuations, a decrease. Roughly, only with larger numbers, the suspended increased at much the same rate as the dimitted Masons until 1918-1919, when they began to decrease. There is no doubt that a proportion, perhaps a larger proportion - there is no means of determining - of suspensions are due to the same cause as dimissions. Brethren move to another locality but neglect to keep in touch with their lodge. It is especially noteworthy that while 1921 showed the smallest balance of unaffiliated Masons in any year after 1915, the number of reinstatements was actually greater than the suspensions. The year 1921 was a remarkable one in several ways. It is one of the indications of the relation between dimissions and affiliations being on the whole a normal one, that this year shows no greater balance of dimits over affiliations than appears in 1925, when suspensions were rapidly increasing and, as will be seen, accessions were still more rapidly falling.

The rapid increase of suspensions is undoubtedly a very unhealthy symptom, and should be carefully considered in the light of the curve of admissions in Chart II. Though here a word of warning must be given. The difference in scale must be taken into account. Were the curve A in Chart II drawn to the same scale as in Chart I, the peak in 1921 would be roughly six times as far from the base line as the curve of dimissions in the same year in the latter chart, which would take it a long way out of the page. The greater numbers involved in Chart II necessitated the reduction of scale. The larger scale was used in Chart I in order to show more distinctly the trend and fluctuations of the different curves.

Turning now to the second chart, the curve D shows the total losses through the three causes dealt with in Chart I. The interesting fact which strikes us first is that from 1913 to 1926 this line falls well below C, the curve of the losses by death during the same period. The death rate serves the purpose of a

standard of comparison. The dotted straight line drawn through C shows that deaths have very steadily increased, which is a necessary consequence of the increase in membership. The year 1919 shows a sharp increase, due doubtless to the influenza epidemic. But the following years show a decreased rate which about balances it. Comparing this with curve D we may perhaps be justified in assuming that losses from other causes have not been critically serious. But unfortunately the year 1927 shows them to be greater than the losses by death. This may be no more than a temporary fluctuation, but it must be noted that since 1921 these losses have tended to increase too steadily, and too sharply, to be an altogether encouraging sign.

But confidence is somewhat restored by the curve of accessions, the line A. These have been so much greater than losses from all sources that, in spite of the latter, the membership has rapidly increased. Yet it is not an altogether healthy curve. It looks like - altogether too much like - a fever chart. The tremendous number of admissions from 1919 to 1921 could not possibly be normal. At least after this "temperature" there would be a period of indigestion, if nothing worse.

It is curious to note that the peak in 1921 was also, as already observed in dealing with Chart I, coincident with the lowest net loss in dimissions and a slight gain as between suspensions and reinstatements. These phenomena, it may be assumed, were all due to much the same causes, whatever they were. The same influences that led to the unparalleled influx from the outside into the Craft, led also to the renewal of lapsed memberships.

The Curve B is plotted from the total net losses from all causes, and here again cause for misgiving is shown. From 1921 on, these losses have been tending ever upward as shown by the dotted line; while, ignoring the steep drop after 1921, there has been, from 1923 on, an even sharper trend downward in accessions. This points to the two lines meeting, or even passing, in 1930; which means in effect that the Masonic birthrate will fall below the death-rate, and the organization come to a standstill, or start on the downward grade, so far as membership is concerned.

Chart III shows the cumulative gross increase over the same period. In this the scale has been still further reduced, as we are now dealing with millions instead of thousands. This increase has been roughly 2,400,000; an average of 160,000 a year, or a-little more than half of that for 1921.

In this chart the four curves are all divergent (with the exception that D is not uniformly so). This is because they show the successive totals in each year from 1912, and not merely the number for each year by itself, as in the first two charts. The greatly reduced scale also tends to iron out the annual fluctuations. The divergence between A and B shows the cumulative totals of losses from death, that between B and C the actual number of unaffiliated Masons, that between C and D the total of the suspended and expelled, while the space between D and the base line represents the number of members in good standing in excess of 1,400,000. If the base were to show zero it would have to be drawn as far below its actual position as the curve D is above it in 1923. When this is taken into account (and to visualize it a sheet of white paper with a base line ruled on it at the right distance might be laid on the page) it will be seen that the losses by non-affiliation and suspension form only a very narrow fringe or border to the area showing total membership. In short they do not give much support to alarmist views.

Coming now to the consideration of the curves in detail, we find that in 1927, in round numbers, 2,460,000 candidates had been admitted into the Order since 1912; while in the same period 444,000 Masons had deceased. In the last named year, 1927, there were 68,000 unaffiliated Masons - not a very large number when compared with millions - and 192,000 who were under sentence of suspension or expulsion; which number Is too large. According to this there were in good standing 3,157,000 Masons. This figure is between 80,000 and 90,000 less than those usually given. But there are many ways in which this discrepancy could have arisen. It must be remembered that returns come into each Grand Lodge at different times and there always has to be a certain amount of approximation. As these curves have been plotted from the positive data it is not probable that they are very far from giving the correct totals.

These curves bring out certain features that are not so easily observable in the two previous charts. They confirm the inference that the number of unaffiliated Masons is on the whole a normal one. Naturally there must always be some unaffiliated Masons - unless every Grand Lodge followed the novel method of forbidding dimission altogether. The greater the total number of Masons, the greater must be the actual number of those who, for one or other of a multitude of good and legitimate reasons, desire to leave one lodge and join another. As this must take, at the least, several months in each case, there must always be a balance of those who are for the time being unattached. The regularity of the divergence between B and C shows conclusively that this proportion has not increased, if anything it appears to have somewhat lessened, when it is compared with the divergence between A and B. For the loss by death must in the long run be about the same among Masons as for the community at large, and thus it gives us a norm by which to judge the other losses.

The curve D does not show quite the same regularity as C, for after having diverged rather too rapidly from 1913 to 1919 it then begins to approach C, and in 1920, 1921 and 1922 runs almost exactly parallel to it, which means that the total remained stationary during those years. But after 1922 it begins to diverge again more rapidly than ever. Whether or not this is merely temporary, a result of the "indigestion" following the orgy of the years 1920 to 1923, remains for the future to show us.

This preliminary and hasty survey at least shows a very promising field for further investigation and research, in which the statistics compiled annually by each Grand Lodge may be made to give up their real significance. Every institution, as every individual, exists in time. A wider realization of this fact is one result of the popular interest in the mathematical theories of relativity propounded by Einstein. As has been well said, history is not the bare record of a series of isolated facts but the representation of a process. We cannot understand any situation unless we have some idea of how it came to be. Without some knowledge of the past it is impossible to even guess at the future. The apparent conclusion to be drawn from this consideration of the history of the growth of the Masonic Fraternity in recent years is mixed. There is no cause for alarm apparently, yet we cannot say that it is wholly healthy and as we could desire it to be.

APPENDIX

As it may be convenient for reference, the round totals as used in preparing the graphs for the article are here given, as taken from the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut. Except in the case of

expulsions, all figures below the hundreds have been omitted, and in some cases those higher than that have been approximated; as for example, 983 may be estimated as practically one thousand.

One thing may be gathered from this table which was not represented in the charts, and that is the relationship of the number of lodges to total membership. The average membership per lodge in 1927 was somewhat under 200, in 1913 it was a little over 100. This again is a characteristic and not reassuring symptom. The average number of suspended Masons to each lodge is very nearly twelve.

Year	Raised	Died	Dimitted	Affil'd	Suspended	Reinstated	Expelled	Membership	Lodges
1913	92,280	21,636	22,660	20,700	14,400	6,498	384	1,519,000	14,114
1914	104,300	22,700	25,300	22,300	17,700	7,200	400	1,607,000	14,145
1915	104,000	22,300	25,800	22,200	19,100	6,900	450	1,681,000	14,698
1916	109,700	25,200	30,200	21,400	20,000	9,600	470	1,749,000	14,712
1917	117,600	25,800	29,000	23,800	19,000	9,800	400	1,822,000	14,800
1918	130,200	26,600	26,500	21,900	20,700	9,000	350	1,932,000	14,920
1919	153,000	35,300	26,400	21,200	15,900	10,800	300	2,037,000	15,069
1920	218,700	31,100	23,800	15,500	13,100	12,700	300	2,238,000	15,168
1921	293,300	29,600	46,500	43,300	12,400	12,800	300	2,521,000	15,426
1922	263,000	29,300	46,700	42,600	15,300	10,000	500	2,721,000	15,696
1923	185,400	32,400	45,000	38,700	22,600	9,600	700	2,872,000	15,951
1924	173,300	32,900	40,700	36,000	26,900	10,200	670	2,978,000	15,997
1925	170,600	35,000	40,600	37,600	30,600	11,100	700	3,009,000	16,257
1926	147,900	34,600	40,900	36,100	40,200	11,600	640	3,131,000	16,400
1927	138,500	38,800	38,000	30,900	47,900	14,200	674	3,243,000	16,470

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